

Altoona Car Shops, Cabinet, Tin and Machine Shop
201 Chestnut Avenue
Altoona
Blair County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-230-C

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PA,
7-ALTO,
2-C-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

ALTOONA CAR SHOPS, CABINET, TIN AND MACHINE SHOP

HAER No. PA-230-C

Location: 201 Chestnut Avenue, Altoona, Blair County, Pennsylvania
USGS Quad: Altoona, Pennsylvania (1:24000)
UTM: 17 E.720850 N.4488900

Date of Construction: 1906

Builder: Pennsylvania Railroad
William H. Brown, architect

Present Owner: Lumax Industries

Present Use: Manufacturing lighting products

Significance: The Cabinet, Tin and Machine Shop is one of the first buildings completed when the Altoona car shops moved to Fourth Street in 1869.

Project Information: This project was undertaken in 1987 by HAER in conjunction with America's Industrial Heritage Project as part of an architectural survey covering a nine-county region in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Randall Cooley, Director. See HAER No. PA-108, Pennsylvania Railroad, Altoona Works, Altoona, Blair County, Pennsylvania for further project information and documentation.

Compiler: Peter Stott, Historian
Gray Fitzsimons, Editor

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History:

Together with the adjacent Blacksmith Shop, the Cabinet, Tin, and Machine Shop is one of the two oldest railroad shop buildings in the Pennsylvania Railroad's Altoona Works. The structure was one of the first buildings completed when the car shops moved to Fourth Street in 1869.

The building was designed to house three different functions: a cabinet making shop, a tin smithing shop, and a machine shop. Over half of the original building (the northern 168') was devoted to cabinet work for passenger cars. James Dredge wrote in 1879 that only "a few light tools are in this building, comprising moulding, mortising, tenoning, and scraping machines, a variety of light band and scroll saws, lathes for circular mouldings, and general work, and machines for making the louvered window shutters for the cars. About eighty men are employed here." The section to the south of the cabinet shop was the tin shop. It was 34' in length and was devoted to making roofs, filters, lamps, and other items for passenger cars. The average work force here in 1879 was twenty-seven men. The remaining 100' (at the south end of the building) was devoted to the machine shop, containing all the necessary equipment for the rolling stock machine work. This included axle lathes, hydraulic presses, drilling machines, bolt cutters, nut-tapping machines, and the like. James Ewing wrote in 1880, that almost all of the original machines were from two Philadelphia firms, William Sellers & Co. and William B. Bement & Son. This equipment was installed under the direction of James Sharp, who continued to act as the machine shop's foreman for many years. Sixty-two men were employed here in 1879. The interior brick wall and arched opening separating this shop from the rest of the building is still visible, together with the supports for a craneway traversing the building.

The entire structure was originally 304' in length. Like the adjoining Blacksmith Shop, it was originally a one-story gable-roofed building. Between 1896 and 1909 it was extended another 150' to the north with a two-story steel-frame and brick addition. It retained its functions as a machine and sheet metal shop, with a tin shop on the second floor until the mid 1960s, when Altoona Enterprises purchased the building from the PRR. Stanley Electric occupied the building from 1968 until its bankruptcy in 1976. The Stanley property was sold at auction to Lumax Industries, which has since used the building as a factory for manufacturing lighting fixtures. Under Stanley ownership, the building was linked to the Blacksmith Shop with a concrete block paint shop and tool room. The present metal siding and office was installed by Lumax in the early 1980s.

Sources:

- Clark, Charles B., ed. Altoona Illustrated: A Complete Pen-Picture of the City of Altoona, Pennsylvania at the Close of the Year 1896. (Altoona: Board of Trade, 1896), p. 33.
- Dredge, James. The Pennsylvania Railroad, its Organization, Construction, and Management. (London: Office of Engineering, 1879), p. 92.
- Ewing, James H. and Step, Harry. History of the City of Altoona and Blair County, including Sketches of the Shops of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. (Altoona: 1880), pp. 169-171.
- Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 25th Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. (19 February 1872), p. 62.
- Sanborn Map Company. Fire Insurance Maps of Altoona, Pennsylvania. New York: The Sanborn Map Company, 1888, 1894, 1909.